Lesson III

Exegesis and Exegetes

There are six main categories of exegesis:

*1. **linguistic Exegesis***

This is concerned with the grammar, syntactic analysis, and rhetoric of Qur'anic discourse. Linguistic exegetes usually refer to examples from classical poetry and prose. Al-Zamakhshari is one of the linguistic exegetes.

*2. **Philosophical and Rationalistic Exegesis***

This is concerned with explaining and refuting philosophers' views and arguments. Fakhar Al-Din Al Razi is an example of this category of exegesis.

*3. **Historical Exegesis***

The main concern of this type of exegesis is Qur'anic parables and the history of nations and peoples mentioned in the Qur'an. The mam exegetes of this kind of exegesis are Al-Tha'labi and Al-Khazin.

*4. **Intertextual Exegesis***

This is referred to as (التفسير بالمأثور) which is to interpret the Qur'an through the Qur'an or the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). In other words, the meaning of a Qur'anic structure is provided by referring intertextually to another Qur'anic structure or to a Hadith. The main exegetes of this approach are Al-Tabari, ibn Al-Jawzi, Al-Suyuti, and Al-Shinqiti.

*5. **Jurisprudence Exegesis***

Jurisprudence exegetes stress jurisprudence matters and the different views of Muslim theologians. Al-Qurtubi is an example of this category of exegesis.

*6. **Independent Judgement Exegesis***

This is referred to as التفسير بالرأي)) or (التفسـير بالاجتهـاد) which is to interpret the Qur'anic "discourse according to one's own judgement and personal point of view. For this reason, some Muslim scholars object to this approach of

exegesis as the exegete may provide a subjective interpretation of the Qur'anic text. Personal judgement exegetes usually take into account the context and co-text of the Qur'anic structure, the referential meanings of Qur'anic words rather than the associative meanings, and the morphology and declension of Qur'anic words. The main exegetes of this approach are Al-Suyuti, Al-Baydhawi, and Al-Razi.

Schools* of *Exegesis

There are three prominent schools of exegesis :

1. The Meccan School which was led by Abdullah bin Abbas.

2. The Medinan School which was led by Ubay bin Ka'b.

3. The Iraqi School which was led by Abdullah bin Mas'ud.

Prominent Exegetes

The following is a brief outline of some prominent exegetes who are usually referred to and required by Qur'an translators. They are ordered chronologically:

l. Al-Tabari, abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid (224 H 310 H). His thirty-volume book is **Jami' Al-Bayan fi Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an**. He tends to highlight the semantic aspects and shades of meaning of Qur'anic words and structures through linguistic and syntactic analyses with heavy reference to classical poetry and grammarians' views; his exegetical approach is intertextual.

2. Al-Baghawi, abu Muhammad Al-Husayn bin Mas'ud. He is also nicknamed as Al-Farra' Al-Baghawi. His four-volume book is **Ma'alim Al-Tanzil**. Al-Baghawi tends to provide a simplified and an abridged exegesis. He also deals with jurisprudence problems and presents the differences without any further elaboration. He does not provide any detailed analysis of rhetorical or syntactic problems and does not explain their impact on the

underlying meaning of Qur'anic structures; this is an intertextual type of exegesis.

3. Al-Zamakhshari, Muhammad bin Amr bin Muhammad bin Amr (467 H - 538 H). His four-volume book is **Al-Kashshaf**. He is a well-known linguist, syntactician and a man of literature. He stresses the aesthetic values of Qur'anic discourse and provides interesting rhetorical and semantic analysis of the Qur'an. He takes this as a means to demonstrate the inimitability of the Qur'an. His exegesis avoids lengthy details; it is a linguistic type of exegesis.

4. ibn Atiyyah, abu Muhammad Abdulkhaliq bin Ghalib (480 H 541 H). His fourteen-volume book **Al-Muharrir Al-Wajiz fi Tafsir Al-Kitab Al-Aziz** is a collection of various exegeses put to the reader in a simple Arabic. He usually refers to syntax when he deals with Qur'anic semantic problems. He also provides examples from classical literature to explain other problems; it is a mixture of linguistic, independent, and intertextual type of exegesis.

5. ibn Al-Jawzi, abi Al-Faraj Jamaluddin Abdulrahman bin Ali (508 H - 597 H). His nine-volume book is **Zad Al-Masir fi TIm Al-Tafsir**. He briefly refers to various theologians' views but has no special preference. He refers to classical poetry and to some scholars such as bin Qutaybah and Al-Farra'; this is an intertextual type of exegesis.

6. Al-Qurtubi, abi Abdullah Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Ansari. His twenty-volume book **Al-Jami' Li'ahkam Al-Qur'an** is an extensively detailed exegesis. He concentrates on jurisprudence matters and explains the different views of theologians on these matters. This is a jurisprudence category of exegesis which is based on Hadith but it also refers to classical poetry.

7. ibn Kathir, Imaduldin abu Al-Fida' Isma'il bin Amr (700 H 774 H). His seven-volume book **Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Adhim** is an intertextual exegesis in which he also provides some details about jurisprudence matters and

refers the reader to useful jurisprudence books for further reading. He does not provide a grammatical analysis in his discussion and avoids reference to classical poetry.

8. Al-Mahalli, Jalaluddin Muhammad bin Ahmad (791 H - 864 H) and **Al-Suyuti, Jalaluddin** Abdulrahman bin abi Bakr (849 H – 911 H). Their book **Al-Jalalayn** is an abridged and simplified exegesis for easy reference which is also available in a pocket size. They also provide a brief grammatical account of Qur'anic structures or words with no reference to classical poetry. Their exegesis is based on independent judgement. At times, it tends to be a mixture of different types of exegesis.

9. Al-Alusi, Shihabuldin Mahmud bin Abdullah (1217 H - 1270 H). His fifteen-volume book **Ruh Al-Ma'ani** is based on Sufi views. It can also be regarded as a summary of various previous exegetes. It is a detailed exegesis with good references to jurisprudence matters. Al-Alusi also provides a thorough syntactic account of Qur'anic structures with ample reference to classical poetry and proverbs; this is a mixture of a linguistic, intertextual, and jurisprudence type of exegesis.

10. Qutub, Sayyid (1387 H - 1966). His six-volume book **Fi Dhilal Al-Qur'an** provides a detailed summary of each Qur'anic Chapter followed by structure-by-structure exegesis using a highly interesting and elaborate literary style. Qutub deals with jurisprudence matters in a simple way and also gives his own views on some of these problems. He also mentions briefly the differences among theologians regarding these problems. This is an attractive exegesis to the modern reader because of its smooth style. It does not deal with linguistic or syntactic problems and also does not refer to classical poetry. This is a unique modern exegesis which tends to be literary in style but there is also a reference to intertextual exegesis.

11. Al-Shinqiti, Muhammad Al-Amin bin Muhammad Al-Mukhtar. His ten-volume book **Athwa' Al-Bayan** is an intertextual type of exegesis. Al-Shinqiti provides

excessive details of jurisprudence matters with reference to Hadith. He also provides a brief linguistic analysis and makes some reference to classical poetry.